

# Vermont Environmental Report

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE VERMONT NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL, A NON-PROFIT CITIZENS' CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION SUPPORTED BY MEMBERSHIP DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS. VNRC, 26 STATE STREET, MONTPELIER--VERMONT, 05602. (802) 223-2328. CHAIRMAN: DAVID R. MARVIN; EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: SEWARD WEBER; EDITOR: NAT FROTHINGHAM.

## Reidel Calls for Action in this Assembly to Stem Neglect of Vermont's FORESTS!!

*In the following "Guest Editorial", Dr. Carl Reidel calls attention to the deplorable condition of Vermont's forest resource. Dr. Reidel has impeccable credentials. He is known to Council members as Vice-Chairman of the VNRC Board of Directors. He is, in addition, Director of the University of Vermont Environmental Studies Program, Vice-Chairman of the Green Mountain Chapter of the Society of American Foresters, and National Vice-President of the American Forestry Association.*

### VERMONT'S FORESTS . . . A Neglected Heritage

As we look ahead to the Third Century of Vermont's independence and subsequent statehood, there is one feature of our stewardship of our natural resources that ought to concern us deeply, and that is the deplorable condition of our forests. For a State that pictures a pine tree on its seal, it is hard to understand how we can continue to neglect the management of our most precious natural resource. And worse, we are conservation hypocrites! We happily cite our conservation heritage from the early writings of George Perkins Marsh and we proudly point to enlightened legislation such as Act 250, yet we fail to practice what we preach.

Strong words? Not at all. The facts are well known, clearly stated in the Agency of Environmental Conservation's 1972 report, **Vermont's Forests**, and in many of the studies by the U.S. Forest Service's

Northeast Forest Experiment Station. The Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Society of American Foresters have repeatedly called for action. Yet we continue to squander a natural resource vital to Vermont's economic future.

The situation is critical. Seventy-five percent of the land in this State is in commercial forests—4.5 million acres—contributing upwards of \$200 million annually to the gross state product. Most of these forests are poor quality, producing considerably less than their potential. Net annual growth is 21 percent less than the average for New England forests because of insects, disease, and lack of management. Much of what is grown—some 2 million cords of low-quality cordwood—remains unused for lack of markets. In sum, our forests are a mess by any standard of good forest management.

And the people are the losers. Over 75 percent of Vermont's commercial forest land is owned by



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## carl reidel calls for assembly action...

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77,000 small owners of which 58,000 own less than 50 acres apiece. This scattering of forest holdings increases daily as excessive property taxes and inadequate profits force subdivision into smaller and smaller tracts.

We don't know all the answers, but some are obvious. Land-use planning and property tax reform are essential. A fair tax, based on forest income, is the only answer, with land-use planning to insure long-term management. If these reforms are not enacted this year, we may lose our last chance for a viable forest industry because land subdivision is irreversibly fragmenting forest land ownership into unmanageable small tracts. Consider these figures. Of all forest land sales in 1975, thirty percent were in tracts of 40 acres or less, compared to only 18 percent of such sales on the average for the previous six years.

We must also begin funding our conservation agencies beyond caretaker levels. The Agency of Environmental Conservation is woefully understaffed and underfinanced, unable to prepare long-range management plans for State forests or to provide essential assistance for private landowners. Fluctuating budgets, constantly eroded by inflation and arbitrary cuts by short-sighted politicians, are destroying an Agency staffed by some of the best professionals in New England.

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### VERMONT ENERGY OFFICE RELEASES REPORT ON HOME INSULATION AND WOOD AS A FUEL FOR HOME HEATING

The Vermont State Energy Office has released a report that highlights the need for greater public understanding of the need for home insulation and that points to the greater use by Vermonters of wood as a primary source of fuel for home heating.

The Energy Office describes the "residential sector" as the largest consumer of energy after transportation. It goes on to say that many Vermonters have apparently overestimated the effectiveness of their present home insulation in terms of today's energy costs.

New initiatives in forestry research and extension education are equally needed. An agriculture-dominated Cooperative Extension Service has long ignored the needs of forest owners for up-to-date information, providing less than one man-year of direct forestry extension assistance. A recent U.S. Forest Service study of Vermont forest landowners revealed that 57 percent of these owners do not know who to contact for forest management assistance. And an underfunded UVM School of Natural Resources is unable to launch needed research and continuing education programs. New programs of applied research, workshops, field demonstrations, and modern media informational systems are essential. In cooperation with state and private agencies, Extension agents could help to organize management and marketing cooperatives to strengthen landowner forest management.

All this will take leadership at the highest levels, and a major new commitment statewide. We mortgaged the State for an Interstate highway system far beyond our needs. Why are we reluctant to invest in the management of the forest resources that could be the basis of our future economic security? Unless we enact needed tax reform and land-use planning and provide a substantial increase in funding for forest management **this year**, we will foreclose our best opportunity to invest in Vermont's future.

In a related matter, the Energy Office found that Vermonters are using wood as a fuel for home heating in increasing numbers. In the 1970 Census, wood was listed as the main source of fuel for home heating in one percent of Vermont households. Today that figure stands at 6.7 percent of those surveyed. The Energy Office reports that the greatest use of wood is in middle income homes where incomes are between \$10,000 and \$19,000 per year.

**SALES OF GASOLINE** as a fuel for motor vehicles in Vermont are following the national pattern of accelerated growth. An estimate from the Federal Highway Administration predicts that gasoline sales in Vermont for 1976 will show an increase of 5.6 percent for 1976 over 1975. This is an accelerated rate of sales compared to the three years between 1973 and 1976. In those years, sales in Vermont rose by an average of 3.8 percent.

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